

Water color

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
To my father	1
We watched a bleeding egg	3
untitled	4
Prime dancer to understudy	5
To first year students	6
Displaced	7
STUDIES	8
Rainsong for an untitled city	9
Post-mortem	10
#2	11
In search of a Flute Man	12
Street	13
Blue green blues	14
CANCION DE JINETE (Lorca)	15
SONG OF THE HORSEMAN (Lorca)	16
Water color	17
After the mid-century	19
Pilgrimage	20
I would a	24
For laura	25
And casts a spell	26
Backwards	27
Wooden Questions	28

	PAGE
Its fall	30
Dream down will dream	31
Bussing into Port Authority Terminal I saw	32
...in Rutherford	34
untitled	35

the black stoker

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black coal-shaking train spits

To my father

"The truth is ...

engines are the engineers now"

as a polished and sootless

automatic coal stoker

on its Annual Fan Trip

pulls snack bar, Rocky Mountain observation car,

air conditioned recliners;

puffs past; pretends for 48 hours, 400 miles,

and 50 bucks a seat

to be a century of iron horse runs.

A green engineer stops

a clean steam whistle

short of long and low.

yet the sound is long enough

for your longing,

low enough to recall how one steam summer

you fell across some lady's lawn her

husband found you overall grey

and the sweat not coming. You lay

there, until a sip from a cup

freed a weeping and a sleep. "Up?"

impossible until your woman came, could ease

you from your sleepsight:

black coal-choking train spits

smokestack grit in water-stop shadows,
wheels its last night ride.

Now, past the time of that passing steam engine
you can salute its crew, thumbs up,
and glide white-in-the-sun steel pumping oil
4 runs a day on Vanderbilt's eastern line;
scorn the diesel Minds:
"the engineers now."

We watched a bleeding egg

We watched a bleeding egg.

What does it mean in the morning
to watch a bleeding egg?

We ate a blooded egg
that gave us that day
dark food for mourning.

Should we have asked forgiveness?
Surely, we were grave. But
it was in the beginning
is now and ever shall be dead
before the consummation--

blood comes back
in dreams and days
to smear a glass
brown a cloth
soak the snow,
burn the groin as it falls--

all such gifts received
with the taking of an egg.

If I could find
a clouded silver shell
that holds the rind
of three oranges, smell
them as I wind
a new year's clock on some mantel
here, I would never go home.

Prime dancer to understudy

Sit on the floor of the upper studio
with your back leaning against a flat
and your head cocked to catch me casually
in diagonals across the floor below.
Hips are in line and open enough that
you are annoyed, yes? Continue to study
nonchalance that frees me to pose and point,
hold and prance in the mirrors I refuse
to see. But you may watch my images
as I dance, for you are permitted joint
parts of enemy and envy.

I choose
contractions and extensions and visages
you scorn now, will mime in agonies
alone, yet never create with this release.

To first year students

it is twenty-nine petals curling,
no one red in its folds,
blown, and nodding
over four brown thorns.

Displaced

I don't know just one river;
I don't know only roan mares
only the creases in Grandfather Mountain's face
or all of Paterson's falls.

If I must have a place it's trains
so no need reminding me
of the ticket between me and a town.

But I'll trade you the post road
I found in the Hudson Valley
for a shrimp boat here in Beaufort, or the rum
run by your great uncle Sandoi
dead before you were born.

STUDIES

1.

Sun Mary's hair
down peacock blue shoulders;
tips drip liquid
from a waxed paper cup.

2.

I came home
with a handful of Kleensweep cleaner's pencils
two torn negatives and a broken toenail
hoping to find at least thanks to last a millenium
but all you said was
you know we don't have a sharpener.

3.

I guess I'll have kids
if I can call them
Jeffrie Bean
Frederick Vinegar
Money and Pneumonia.

Rainsong for an untitled city

street stutters:

"stone gutters."

Post-mortem

Did I leave,
crated, paperbacks packed
in a 1957 black hearse-house
(better than hitching
and at least a friend's)
to find
classified in yesterday's Village Voice
your epitaph:

"neophyte sculptor
crushed by unfinished
female form (walnut)
falling from Jeep Scout
tailgate."?

#2

I walked into a much metal building,
touched my hands to much metal windows;
outside milk-wine lilies grew.

And downing a much metal turning stairwell
was a much metal sound;
outside milk-wine lilies grew.

It downed me in a much metal room,
and I died last night in that much metal tomb;
outside milk-wine lilies grew.

In Search of a Flute Man

There's a man who blows
/Flute Man play me
a song/
music on a pipe
music from his mouth
into shapes in the air
for me
/Flute Man where can
you be?/
music in his hands
along a blue tone
that molds me, makes me play
like his pipe
swings me in the air
around, around and down,
and blows me out
a rounded glass note soul
that he can see
that I can be to please him.

Street

Cried a kid:

"There's a bleeding lady
on the corner of 95th and Broadway."

Unheard.

Coincidentally said a stranger
guided down the 'way:

"In my country
when someone lies in the street
all the people all they come."

Did his guide
to prove we are not an unfriendly people
grab a glass
through "Eat Maven's" open doorway
to catch the blood:

"It's like Mateus."

Blue green blues

I see your blue green eyes,

I see your blue green eyes,

Don't you see me too, blue green eyes...

you do.

I hear your blue green eyes,

I hear your blue green eyes,

Don't they say what talkings never do...

they do.

I feel your blue green eyes,

I feel your blue green eyes,

Don't they burn me turning away...

they do.

CANCION DE JINETE

Federico García Lorca

Córdoba.

Lejana y sola.

Jaca negra, luna grande,
y aceitunas en mi alforja.
Aunque sepa los caminos
yo nunca llegaré a Córdoba.

Por el llano, por el viento,
jaca negra, luna roja.
La muerte me está mirando
desde las torres de Córdoba.

¡Ay que camino tan largo!
¡Ay mi jaca valerosa!
Ay, que la muerte me espera,
antes de llegar a Córdoba.

Córdoba.
Lejana y sola.

Canciones 1921-24

SONG OF THE HORSEMAN

Federico García Lorca

Córdoba.

Distant and alone.

Black pony, large moon
and olives in my saddle bag.
Although I know the road
I will never arrive at Córdoba.

Over the plain, through the wind,
black pony red moon.
Death is watching me
from the towers of Córdoba.

O the road is so long!
O my valorous pony!
And death is waiting for me
before my arrival at Córdoba.

Córdoba.
Distant and alone.

Water color

From this waiting room chair
 black autumn profiles and the river's curve
 are geometrics on a wall to a Wednesday morning brain.
 Gap streaks of sky soak into the porous paper,
 leave water marks zigzagging into the ground line.
 The river laps in brush strokes,
 refuses to shimmer beneath a water paint sun.
 My gaze sinking, penetrates the diluted pigment surface,
 and I see, not reflection, but sketch lines.

Yet

there was such a day
 brown framed and grey matted
 conjured by camel hair brushes and water pots.

We woke to light patterns
 slotted through barn wood.
 "Kitchen" was the side in the sun
 (coffee cup warmth would be a while coming).
 Across a rotted slat in the doorway
 someone had slung a snakeskin bleached and blowing.
 And out: a field, matted cornstalks, picture-still.

"...to the water"

but I followed slow.

Sidesteps, slips; wild grasps and thorns;

flash mica chips along the bank.

You would not wait for me to cross

(did you know I would not cross?)

And my eyes followed the shifts in the trees along
your path.

To wait for you, a molded sleep along

a trunk gating the river.

Balanced wakings blurred the water that would not
yield your face.

Water laps, broken, refused to shimmer beneath the sun.

My gaze sinking, penetrated the surface

and I saw twigs, black and crossing like

sketch lines.

Did I know then,

cupping the water so colorless in my hands

the wait as wide then as now?

After the mid-century

I find I am drawn
to small inked lines
not full stroked
but lines enough
to point the eye
to "stone".

Pilgrimage

Each spring we come down the coast way, A1A,
 count license plates, Coke bottles, Burma Shave signs.
 until we are
 stopped by his sea,
 stunned by our father's sea
 we, even staring under planes of hand shade,
 cannot see.

(That first time:

mother's serene cream skin
 a screen in the shade for mango leaf patterns
 while we, brown and knowing
 beachcombers would take us for year-rounders,
 circled out and back to her "falda",
 folds of skirt, and father's word for that nest).

We weigh and wait
 the courtesies, the owner's little lies,
 and each year father's final "sí".
 As we cross the palm leafed patio,
 cracked tile crumbling in faded citrus green,
 up a stucco outside stair,
 brush blackened wicker chairs stacked seat to seat
 on the balcony walk,
 his words are slipping Spanish waves

that surround and drown us:

"Children, such was Las Conchas.

La casa de mi padre...

but then at this hour,

the hour,

la hora,

esta hora,

could we sit (dulces y café)

at his knee--at my father's knee--

the sea before us, and at the left

el sol, setting."

And we three, not with him,

search the sea for his island,

catch the sun setting on the right sides of our bodies.

He returns: turns to take us

into the rooms through a warped double door

shutting out the sea with wood jalousie slats:

"They are wide, those 90 miles

between this house, y ésta...

more wide,

mas y mas,

than all those we travel here to Florida:

Florida. Flores. Pascua florida.

A place named for the flowers, flores;

the feast of the flowers--

the spring--the Easter feast."

And each year we fill the room with his flowers,
failing not filling, like memory's
"...flores...y Las Conchas"
murmur.

Bathing,

the water--glass and noon blue from the Gulf--
we listen:

"Your mother, niñas,
she has not seen Las
Conchas. Not even was
she your age, carinas,
when I was fleeing."

And sifting through us softly
almost soundless
if we did not sigh too his words inside us,
his

"ai, mi Cuba, mi casa..."

"But tell them, Ruth,
what its name means for you know."

And blond, from Boise Idaho, bending,
her hand crabs the sand
until for each of us she has

"a shell. Las Conchas: The Shells."

Week's end we turn our backs to the sea,
return unwilling to northern spring
grey and not yet begun.

He turns from the life of the sun,
returns more than willing for the cold and another year.

I would a

I would a-waiting go
beneath your window so
to hear the laughter oh
I know the sound.

I would a-wanting walk
behind your walkings hawk
to feed on leanest talk
I know the sound.

I would a-weeping wing
around your lover's ring
to hear you kiss the thing
I know the sound.

For laura

All the dark faces
ringed with dark circles
all the sad young girls
sing thinly like their loins
like thin flesh under their eyes:
"A penny for a dildoe
Now my man is gone."

And casts a spell

When my horn brush brushes my hair
it charms: "do not see parting strands,
do not listen to the bristle
you hear when other hair untangles."

I follow yellow stained handle
and bent straining fingers
so long stroking close to my face
I begin to pull out hairs.

If I were a furious weaver
I would card the hairs from my brush,
I would string them on a loom,
I would weave them for a shroud.

Backwards

Break my bones

take them out of my body. I

wake without them

see them in the corner:

knee loose, left knee cap,

free vertebraes, and also fractured phalanges. In

prone position, sticking parts, I consider

bone: calcified continuity well

known for property of support. You

can't put them back in my skin, or,

slant the bed and I'll slide out, or,

plant perrennial rye and leave.

Wooden Questions

Planks extend above our shoulders
and under our feet until we are stopped
by a crooked door jamb.
Up the grainy steps I can already ask
why is the cat I cannot see
between my legs
as I wait behind you on the landing
for a light to show me her there.
Your answer
is better than a word
and a face appears behind the metal screen.
The cat pours like black paint
between the plaster pieces scattered on
the unvarnished floor, hisses us down beside her.
We wait for tea and rice in brass bowls
and your friend to paint his mind
in India ink "for mother."
Who am I for you sitting
dance legged, sucking green tea,
counting the leaves that escape?
--Watch me watch the cat watch me--
I tell you she can never,
humping her back against our hands,
break us. You know, and so
to your friend:

the "Blue Room"? Or is it just a room
papered and peeling.

I rock against the rhythm
of the shutters and do not ask
will we make love to the sound of wood.

Its fall

I looked at the down lit wool
on my covered breast
and I found a bent black hair.

The taking of it in my hands
was enough to break it at the end.

It hardly snapped
and let me remember
the name of another lover.

Dream down will dream

There is a salt sweet
ocean drowning dream
in the tasting, tongue touching
of the air.

There is your body breath
before the end of my dream.

After your face, there is
a want wet pressed, a waking
to the where of you gone.

Bussing into Port Authority Terminal I saw

7 pigeons on a roof,
backs to me and past them
casement frames box tenement people
in silent simultaneous operas.

Will Mordecai Jacob's navel freeze
as he contemplates boats and trains on his faded drawers
hanging out his open window?

6 pigeons on a roof:
will anyone wed Mrs. Schlockmeister's daughter
if she is found ecstatically massaging
the folds of her underarm?

Will little Lonnie Schlockmeister,
the sling shot maven,
knock off another pigeon?

Should widow Kenny retrieving
her pink 42 C
from her husband's sister's washload
leave daughter Kathleen defenseless?

Will Rose Link's fifth failure
making bread

be grounds for separation?

Will Irving Jacobs make it with the pants
before Kathleen's mother returns?

6 pigeons on a roof:

make a bet Lonnie leaves

before the birds do.

...in Rutherford

7:59

O Williams Carlos Williams

what did you do

in your park bench college town

when after June 20

the library had no Saturday hours

and the borough hall didn't open til 9

and the post office didn't have one;

and the campus

probably no sessions for the summer and

too far to walk for the condition you were in,

the condition you were in

being dire need of a bathroom?

11:26

Behind the town a street runs

along a railroad, same names.

Looking in a shed there, a shop there:

jagged glass, flawed glass, stained glass leaded,

hung in dirty panes. Looking out--

a church there--prisms in a prayer of colors.

iron
willow
man.